

A Future with No One Living in Poverty and Hunger

Highlights from an International
Youth Writing Contest



October 2007

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“A 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment” is an initiative of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to develop a shared vision and a consensus for action on how to meet future world food needs while reducing poverty and protecting the environment. Through the 2020 Vision Initiative, IFPRI is bringing together divergent schools of thought on these issues, generating research, and identifying recommendations.

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To attain a world where poverty and hunger are problems of the past, all stakeholders, including the people affected by poverty and hunger, should play their roles in stronger partnership to complement each other in the struggle.

—OPIO DERRICK HOSEA, Age 18, Uganda

All the ongoing efforts against poverty and hunger are wanting in one vital element: coordination. And coordination is obviously very instrumental, as the problem being dealt with is a global one, and has implications for the rich countries as well as the poorer ones.

—RIDWAN BILLAH KUSHAL, Age 15, Bangladesh

FOREWORD

For the third time IFPRI has asked international youth to share with us their reflections on ways to overcome global hunger and poverty. The messages as we saw them in 2001 and in 2004 are renewed and repeated here—overwhelmingly so, since close to 600 youngsters from as many as 39 countries offered their thoughts and solutions.

This is an encouraging outcome in many ways, for as one of the contenders wrote us, we might have thought that after the indolent “Generation X” there was not much to expect. But her present “Generation Y,” she felt, would be one of responsibility and involvement. The essays certainly prove her point.

And it also holds great promise that so many have taken time to dig into the facts and problems of the current global imbalance in human welfare. Because, as the winner of the competition, Ashley Eberhart, underlines so convincingly, awareness is the point of departure for activism, leading to results.

Many knew a lot before they started to write, if not in the form of dry figures, then as general background knowledge and an uneasy feeling about the lack of fairness and justice regarding basic human needs. Interestingly, however, in many cases these young problem solvers have emphasized the human lives that are at stake. They have focused on the individual, the immense pain facing the desperate Indian mother, the Ugandan orphan, the homeless itinerant.

A keyword for these youngsters sharing their worries with us is, indeed, “share.” There is, definitely, more empathy, more altruism, and more global commitment among these young people than you would find in your average national or international institution. This, of course, also means that harsh “realism” is not always reflected in their proposals for solutions. But they trust that realism can be influenced and changed. Abolish poverty and hunger? But of course. At one point in time, as one of them points out, it seemed impossible for human beings to fly to the moon. But we did it.

And these 600 young writers encourage us to make also this giant leap for mankind, and end human misery born of poverty and hunger once and for all.

JOACHIM VON BRAUN

Director General, IFPRI

RAJUL PANDYA-LORCH

Head, 2020 Vision Initiative

EBBE SCHIØLER

Chair, Contest Jury

*Because we do not understand them
Doesn't make them weeds
If we wish to be true equals
We need to plant the seeds*

—SAMANTHA GRACE DEANE, Age 15, Germany

*Poverty should be attacked as
a global problem even more nefarious
than terrorism.*

—GIRISH PANDA, Age 18, India

WINNER
ASHLEY EBERHART
Age 16
United States
A Little Hard To Swallow

*I am the cause of world hunger.
 I wander through aisle after aisle of endless food.
 I wonder nothing as I wash uneaten leftovers down the sink.
 we are not facing a food shortage crisis.
 we are facing an apathy crisis.
 yes, I am
 the cause of world hunger,
 the reason 798 million people go to sleep every night with a bear clawing their insides,
 the murderer of 12 million children every year.
 I am
 the unknowing apathetic.*

Just southeast of Florida is an island nation by the name of Haiti. I was there once on a cruise, finding it a perfectly delightful place, with a lovely market and charming locals. It was only recently that I found out the truth about where I had vacationed. Finding Haiti to be “an undesirable location” due to “recent political unrest,” Royal Caribbean, the cruise line I traveled on, boasted that it “cordoned off a remote portion of this island, and the totally safe and private compound provides guests an opportunity to experience the magnificent beauty of the region.” They rechristened the area Labadee. This was the “Haiti” I had seen. The actual country was named the second hungriest nation in the world in 2000 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), where the 62 percent of the population who are undernourished lack an average of 460 calories a day. To think, my father and I went jet-skiing off the coast of a nation characterized by constant hunger pains, only to return to our ship in time for the elaborate banquet held that evening.

A possible answer to the question posed by world hunger can be summed up in five words: *awareness, activism, economy, peace, and education*. The first two realms are up to citizens of the developed world, while the remaining three fall to struggling nations, helped by their more prosperous counterparts. Nations worldwide must put aside border lines and cultural prejudices to work together in finding a solution. Standing alone is not an acceptable option for humanity.

I. AWARENESS

*I am not here to make you feel guilty,
 I am not here to make your conscience weep.
 but you are just as much to blame
 as me.*

Chronic hunger didn't happen overnight, so we cannot expect an overnight cure. Root causes are many, making it impossible for a one-size-fits-all solution. The 1996 World Food Summit called for a goal to reduce hunger by 50 percent by 2015. While this is a commendable ambition, with many regions—notably China and India—making enormous strides toward nutrition, what of the remaining 400 million world citizens, the 50 percent whose hunger will not be assuaged? Thus far, simple, effective methods have proved useful, such as education, which raises salaries to improve quality of life and reduces birthrates, creating fewer mouths to feed. However, if hunger is to be eradicated, increasingly creative methods must be used to chisel at the problem. The first step in any humanist objective is to raise awareness, particularly in the developed world. Indifference is a powerful weapon, one with a rich history of flirting with conflict. Give people something to fight for, and blame can no longer be placed on the silence of the individual.

II. ACTIVISM

*I live in a country where 66 percent of my fellow citizens,
crammed with donuts, french fries, and Starbucks to go,
are coated with a slimy layer of
glistening yellow fat
resting drowsily just beneath their rubbery skin.
we eat our feelings,
we eat our cravings,
we eat
because it's there.*

Everyone plays a role in the world hunger crisis, but I would like to focus on my own country, the United States, for a moment, as the subject literally hits home for me. We are a nation of abundance; at any given time, 96.1 percent of our citizens are at least moderately food secure. An ample supply of soup kitchens and food pantries ensures that most of our poor will not go hungry. Naturally, this is praiseworthy, but our work in improving hunger security in other countries is somewhat lacking. America's abundance is supplemented by its consumer-oriented nature. If instead we could channel our consumption as generosity, the United States could be a formidable weapon in the face of hunger. The individual activist could play a central role in this transformation, writing letters to local congressmen urging new legislation and raising community awareness with demonstrative "hunger banquets" or even protests. To boast of a country ruled by the people, the people must speak first. Our citizens, who have on the whole been blessed with prosperity, have a responsibility to our brothers and sisters in the world outside America's borders.

III. ECONOMY

*8,242 miles from my overflowing refrigerator
lies a small country called
Somalia.
most classmates I ask have never even heard of it.
the ones who have are at a loss as to where it is.*

*oh, but they should know. because while my peers grab a quick latte,
75 percent of Somalia's citizens,
living on little more than \$1.63 per day,
enter in a daily struggle to stretch their skin
around spindly bones
and aching joints.*

I find it hard to believe that half the world lives on less than \$2 per day (globalissues.org), but find it harder still to believe that I could not do that at all. It feels increasingly hypocritical to engage in this field of activism when I calculate my own daily cost of living. The inconsistency is mind-boggling. Poverty has a direct correlation to hunger. In an article entitled "12 Myths About Hunger," the Institute for Food and Development Policy emphasizes that "enough wheat, rice and other grains are produced to provide every human being with 3,500 calories a day...The problem is that many people are too poor to buy readily available food." This doesn't even include other staples, such as fresh produce or beans. We have enough food—it's just that the distribution, like much of society, is tremendously unequal. In an economically secure world, the established human right to the basic necessities of life would be met for all people. The next step in the hunger struggle is to stabilize the economies of struggling countries. If they are not helped to thrive financially, these areas will remain a missing piece of the hunger puzzle for years to come.

IV. PEACE

*the ferocious growling of a little girl's stomach
is her only twilight lullaby.
chest heaving in ragged breaths,
this beast within
is all she's ever known.
that, and the gunshots echoing through the night.*

"They rape the women, take the children. You wake up in the morning and say 'I want to live today.'" I recently had the opportunity to meet with Daoud Ibarahaem Hari, a refugee of the genocide in Darfur. His somber words echoed throughout a roomful of stunned ears as he described the warfare raging across his country. War has a terrifying relationship with starvation, one that is taking its toll right now in Sudan. CNN recently reported that an estimated one in five children in the Darfur region is "severely malnourished." Janjaweed militiamen will kill men outside village limits, so women must venture forth, facing the constant threat of rape and beatings on treacherous hunts for food. Amnesty International is particularly worried about the rainy season, a gap between harvests, where the daily mortality rate is estimated at 3,000 (Reeves 2004). Another elemental figure in the eradication of world hunger is to bring peace to the world, but this may prove to be the most difficult task of all. The world must act now to bring help to Darfur and other areas ravaged by war. Granting refugee status, airlifting food, and sending in peacemaking troops only marks the beginning of this crusade. But it is crucial. As Dante once cautioned, "The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality."

V. EDUCATION

*the family lives in the so called
land of opportunity
where the streets are paved with gold.
there is no gold
walking down the alley to pick up food stamps
and grabbing some outdated produce
from the corner store dumpster
so that they can have some dinner tonight.*

Thirty-four million is a staggering digit. Even more incredible is using this number in the context of an industrialized country's food insecurity. The United States seeks to assist foreign nations, whom we refer to as "third world" or "undeveloped" with condescending detachment, while simultaneously ignoring our own citizens struggling with undernourishment. This is not the fault of the victims. Merely residing in a modernized nation does not secure financial and nutritional freedom, nor should such problems be chalked up to laziness or lack of motivation. As an example, consider that the cause of a homeless man dying in an alley from hypothermia one January night is not the fault of the weather. Rather, the blame lies in a society where the economically insecure are not protected. A country's high gross domestic product per capita is irrelevant if 10 percent of its citizens hold 70 percent of the wealth, as has been the case in the United States in recent years (United for a Fair Economy 2006). If a country does not possess an overwhelming desire to financially assist nations struggling with hunger, it could at least serve its own people, establishing government programs to aid the needy, adjusting tax laws, and increasing federal aid for college-bound students from struggling families. Education is the key to unlocking countless freedoms the world over. Investing in education equates to improving an exponential amount of futures.

*again, I'm not pushing the world's guilt onto your shoulders alone.
certainly no one
could possibly have that weight thrust upon them.
but you're not off the hook yet. you see,
what have you done to help?
...I thought so.
you get your slice of blame now, served with a side of disappointment. no extra charge.
don't worry.
your indigestion is completely normal.
this stuff is hard to swallow.*

*but you can keep the acid reflux at bay
if you get up off that couch,
put the potato chips back where they came from,
and do something.*

I do not pretend to hold the solution to eradicating hunger in my young hands. In many respects, from being a legal minor to the fact that I am not even authorized to operate a motor vehicle,

I am simply a child. I can hardly boast superior knowledge of how the world works, much less form ideas on how to improve it that so many others before me have failed to accomplish. But, as an individual, I am confident in my ability to make a difference. My favorite gem of advice, straight from the mouth of Leo Tolstoy, is that “everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” There may be 798,000,000 people going to bed hungry tonight, but there are also 5,804,224,175 more snuggling up under the blankets with a full stomach who could help them. I am ready to say something. I must speak up now, because each day I wait will cost 42,500 lives. No human being would knowingly want that on their conscience. But it’s there. We’re all to blame.

*you take those pictures in your mind:
skin draped over mere skeletons,
the mother giving up her food to keep her children alive,
watching as most of the crops she harvests are exported to countries who can afford it.
let them absorb you
as you run to Wendy’s for a burger.
think now of how easy it is for you to be filled.
think now of those 798 million starving people—they are your brothers, your sisters-
the world is your family.
and you are ignoring them.*

*I hope their faces haunt you
every time you
crack open a box of cereal.
cram a handful of cookies down your throat.
I hope you choke
on the way you ignore your family.*

like I said, it’s hard to swallow.

**I hope you do something.
I hope you do it now.**

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*So, Come On! Fellow leaders
Give up our greed and our egos
For a better earth without poverty and hunger
And the best future of our children.*

—TAYAMA RAI, Age 15, Nepal

*We, the youth of the developed world, have a
mammoth responsibility, the moral challenge
of our time: To eradicate extreme poverty and
promote equality for all.*

—GRACE LOUKIDES, Age 16, Australia

RUNNER UP

SWARNAVA MAJUMDAR

Age 15

India

How We Can Make Poverty and Hunger Problems of the Past

Poverty and hunger are the two gloomiest abysses of this supersonic age of laptops, iPods, and iPhones. When hundreds of young people queued up for hours and paid unusually large sums to get their hands on this much-awaited 'techno-toy' iPhone, they probably forgot that their African counterparts go without food for days at a stretch. People in Sub-Saharan Africa know what hunger is; and they know what it feels to be poor; so terribly poor that they cannot afford to buy any clothing for months—let alone something as bizarre as an iPhone.

Poverty and hunger are indeed the two most serious problems threatening mankind in all nations across the globe. Barring a few developed countries, no other nation can boast of having a 100 percent well-fed population above the poverty line. These two problems are even more ensnaring as they are complementary to each other. When poverty begins to raise its ugly head, hunger starts creeping in automatically. And having a dearth of money means cutting down on some amenities. After leaving no stone unturned, people start cutting down on food. The result is obvious: hunger.

After having confronted several other problems, mankind has finally zeroed in on removing poverty and hunger from all nations across the globe. It's time to declare war on this problem, not merely in a few Eastern European countries, but for the vast multitudes in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The first sensible step is obviously international cooperation. It is only when that the superpowers join together that people's welfare can be improved. The developed nations must not make it a point of individual competition in extending help to their poorer counterparts. The feeling of sacrificing one's ego should be a requisite for this.

While welcoming help from others, underdeveloped nations must also take steps themselves to remove these two ills. Disarmament is the first and most important step for this. Every year, the defense budgets of all the nations in the global village soar. There is an eternal mad rush for inventing, purchasing, trading, and storing the latest weapons of mass destruction. This no doubt creates a well-defended nation, but at the same time, it creates a poor, hungry nation. Thus, all the nations across the globe should take up the principle of disarmament. They all should simultaneously give up the use of force to pronounce their domination over others: that is to say, they should abstain from the path of violence and the use of weapons. This reduces the feelings of insecurity due to foreign aggression or threats thereof. Thus, all the nations can gradually start disarmament, and the immense sums thus saved can be efficiently used for feeding the population.

Spending money to feed the population is feasible only when the population is not too big. Thus, population control comes next only to disarmament in priority. Mass awareness campaigns should be conducted, making people aware of the advantages of having a small family. People should be educated to adopt birth control.

Next comes education. People should be educated not to squander money, but rather save it for the future. They should think on scientific lines and rise above petty religious superstitions. Corruption should be done away with. People should cooperate with each other for the development of the community as a whole.

Scientists should focus on inventing new high-yielding varieties of seeds rather than developing new explosives. They should try discovering pesticides and fertilizers that do not harm the soil. At present, farmers prefer chemical fertilizers to natural ones as they produce better crops more quickly and in greater volumes. However, such fertilizers are harmful to the soil in the long run. They bring about genetic mutations in the crops grown on these damaged soils. This in turn adversely affects humans. So, the use of chemical fertilizers needs to be stopped at all costs. However, this will reduce the crop yield and cause greater hunger. Moreover, it will also cause unemployment due to closure of the chemical industries and, consequently lead to poverty. Thus, governments must implement more sophisticated and elaborate policies to get out of this vicious circle. Cultivable areas must be increased. The deserts can be made productive if governments are enterprising and extend modern irrigational facilities there.

Man may only be about six feet tall, but he has conquered the vast seas, the highest mountains, the densest forests, and the mysterious moon. Where there is peace and harmony, poverty and hunger are sure to bow down to the mighty human will. It will not be a surprise if by 2020 you see people working on their laptops in high-rise buildings in Ethiopia.

*Don't people get that this world isn't like
Disneyworld? All the problems don't
just fix themselves here, they won't just
go away if everyone closes their eyes and
wishes really hard.*

—COURTNEY ROBERTS, Age 15, USA

*Wars can also be a reason
That makes people poor
Ways must be found
To end these dangerous wars.*

—CHANDIMA NAYANI WERAGODA, Age 14, Sri Lanka

HONORABLE MENTION

ALLISON BORGES

Age 16

United States

Acknowledging Poverty

The midnight-kissed streets hide a well-kept secret.
 The town's dirty laundry.
 But the night cannot block out the sounds.
 Crackling of fire, shuffling of feet, cries of a hungry child, screams of a man without a fix.
 Vibrations spread throughout the ground.
 A hard, threatening black voice shoots his anthem to the world;
 Of drugs, sex, and grime.
 It illuminates nothing,
 But the headlights do.
 A flash.
 The shadows become forms;
 Imperfections of the human figure.
 Demasculinized and emaciated.
 Dark skin, light skin, and all in between,
 Ragged, with pleading eyes.
 Hardened to the world.
 As fast as they were illuminated they fade away;
 A nuisance.
 A parasite.
 We see them no more, but the sounds are still there.
 The smells;
 Fire, Urine, Garbage.
 Smells and sounds of a fight for life.
 When the sun rises they dissolve into the background of the world.
 Blend into the grays and browns of the buildings,
 Sink into the concrete;
 One with the ground.
 They are the blood, the eyes, the heart of the city.
 They are poverty.

I want to feel a world without poverty.
 Stretch my fingers to the sky;
 Exposed nerves.
 Feel security running through my veins
 Up to the eyes that see it.

The sense of all full bellies.
 The air would be lighter if there were no more hardships.
 My streets would grow lonelier and lonelier.
 The lonelier they grew the wider my smile would become.
 I'd feel compassion running through me.
 Infectious.
 Spreading from me,
 To you,
 To all.
 Unselfishness will replace our needs in life.
 To care, to be unafraid.
 Because they are not as clean, as neat, as educated as we are.
 But this does not mean they are not equal.
 Not deserving.
 They are our souls.
 Our greatest shame.

Ignorance.
 We fake our honey-coated ignorance of the fact that there are people out there;
 People out there who starve.
 Lives wholly different from ours.
 Lives that suffer.
 But we will heal this world through unity,
 Through sight.
 We will stand together as humans.
 Open our eyes to the events around us.
 See that it is our world.
 No artificial life form or religious deity will come down and clear away our problems.
 It's our fight.
 Change the way we think,
 End war,
 Help our fellow human beings.
 Educate them on healthy living.
 Our own beings are not number one.
 We treat others as we treat ourselves.
 This is not the "Golden Rule" of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism;
 It is humanity's rule.
 It starts with peace.
 A love for all men.
 A complete cease-fire.
 Spreading to better economies.
 Economies not spending billions on weapons that kill,
 But on people who produce life.
 We will raise streets, farms, houses, schools, clean water, and electricity out of barren waste-
 strewn lands.

We will wash our brothers' faces,
Heal our children's distended bellies,
We will build schools to educate people on how to live and produce sustainable crops.
Affordable housing and equal job opportunities will be available.
Sweatshops will close;
Children will be in school where they belong.
Because saying you have a dream is not enough.
If we act,
We act now.
So future generations can open their eyes to a world full of hope,
And when all firstborns scream of hunger, none will go unsatisfied.
It starts now.
With my streets,
With your streets.
Blossoming through the roads.
Following sewer lines to other cities.
Busting through manhole covers.
Changing more lives
Spanning across oceans,
Language barriers,
Religions.
Unity through a quest to end poverty.
It starts with you, me, and unfailing peace.



*If all the world went hungry there'd be no
'buts' or 'ifs.' We'd be more altruistic.
For others we would give.*

—SOPHIA MOSS, Age 17, USA

*I do not think at all that the Heavens have
chosen me to do great things and I know
that I cannot change the world on my own.
But I want to fight against the cruel world
that I am part of ... I hope that one day ...
there will not be any diseases, hunger,
or poverty.*

—MILESLAVA GEORGIVA BOGDANOVA, Age 16, Bulgaria

HONORABLE MENTION

SUDIP MAJI

Age 14

India

How to Reduce Poverty and Hunger in the World

Though I am a little boy of 14 years, the poverty and the status of the poor people in our society hurts me very much. I want to do something for the recovery of that part of our society, but I do not have the power or position to do that. I hope that the following points will help you to get the desire to do it. They are:

1. *Reducing the Population:* I think population growth is the main problem that is creating poverty and hunger in our society. So, reducing the population would be the way to reduce the problem. Although all of us know that it is impossible to reduce a population in one day, we can stop it from increasing. Increasing populations create many problems like pollution in the environment, less food, less income, less land for each person, and as a result—more hunger and poverty. We can make laws to stop population growth (as in China), and they will surely give good results.

2. *Improving Education:* A lack of education is the main reason for population growth because people are not aware. If a country can achieve 100 percent literacy, then population growth will not be a problem for it. As an example, India's population is rising at a high rate and according to many calculations, will pass China's by the year 2010. All of us know that this is the result of non-education. But in China, increasing literacy has stopped the population growth. Education is also the main way to get employment. A well-educated person always has the chance for a good life. Illiteracy pushes people into a life of hunger and poverty. So governments around the world have to help their countries to be well-educated to oppose hunger and poverty.

3. *Encouraging Small Industries:* Encouraging the growth of small industries in parallel with big industries will help countries fight against poverty. Poor people mostly depend on small industries. In India, most people in cities and villages rely on small industries like food processing, clothmaking, etc. There are various types of other small industries all over the world. If governments around the world can develop the small industries, there will be no poverty and hunger in any country. This can be a way to increase the economical level of poor people around the world.

4. *Encouraging Agriculture:* Countries that develop their agriculture would not have to face problems like hunger and poverty. They can also solve many other critical problems: first, if agriculture develops, it will produce more food so the price of food will be low and it will help reduce hunger. Second, developing agriculture will help farmers to earn more, and will help reduce poverty. Governments can develop agriculture in many ways. They can use high-producing seeds and they can give more water, electricity, etc. to farmers. So, developing agriculture would be a good way to reduce hunger and poverty.

5. Developing the Transportation System: Governments can fight poverty and hunger by developing their country's transportation systems. If they can link each village and city, the country's economic level will certainly increase a lot. Transportation systems cannot fight against the problems directly, but they can help industries—especially small industries—and agriculture. With the help of transportation systems, people in villages and small places can take things made from small industries and agriculture to the cities to sell. That way, they can earn more. And people without any work can go to the big cities to find jobs. So, in these ways, transportation systems can help countries to vanquish hunger and poverty forever.

6. Organising New Industries: Governments should organise new industries to reduce hunger and poverty. New industries will give more employment and allow people to earn more. This will also decrease the number of people who do not have any jobs. So, there will be less poverty, and if there is less poverty, the number of hungry people will automatically decrease. As an example, the Indian government has taken steps to improve industries and as a result, is growing economically. So this way, countries around the world can control hunger and poverty by organizing several new industries.

7. Decreasing the Price of Essential Commodities: Nowadays, the prices of things like computers, televisions, washing machines, and other electronic items are decreasing. But, only the rich can afford these things. Poor people do not want these things and also cannot afford them. However, it is wrong for the price of essential commodities to remain the same or get higher. In my view, governments should decrease the prices of essential commodities first and then focus on the other things. That way, the poor can easily get essential things like food items, clothes, etc., and that could help defeat hunger and poverty.

8. Keeping Peace All over the World: Nowadays, several wars are going on all over the world like the United States-Iraq war. Many costly and powerful weapons are being used. These not only kill people but also pollute the environment. The most dangerous weapons are nuclear weapons. Many countries like North Korea and Iran are making them by spending a lot of money. In my view, if all the countries stop quarrelling with each other, the world will not have problems like poverty and hunger. Stopping wars will save a lot of money, which can be used to help the poor. Countries can use peace as a weapon in the war against hunger and poverty.

9. Holding Meetings on the Matter with National Leaders from All over the World: All people on the earth want a future with no one living in poverty and hunger. So, we should hold meetings with national leaders like the meeting that is going to take place in China. This will provide ideas. Leaders would have to discuss and choose ways to achieve a shining future.

So, these are my views. I think they will help national leaders solve the problem of hunger and poverty. Let us dream to live in a world with less poverty and hunger. Dreams can come true—we will have to do it.

Let the next man be your friend. When he's sad, try to dry his tears. If he's worried, give him hope. If he's scared, please help him reduce his fears. When he's confused, kindly help him cope. When he's lost and can't seem to see the light, you're expected to be his star, shining so bright. This should be your oath, a pledge you should keep till the end. Why? Because he's your friend.

If everybody keeps this pledge, then before 2015, the world would be a better place to live in. Free from the pangs of poverty. I can bet my last dollar on this.

—OKIEMUTE JUDE IMERETI, Age 18, Nigeria

HONORABLE MENTION

ANGELA VARGAS

Age 16

United States

All It Takes is a Little Change

6,602,224,175 mouths to feed
 854 million don't receive the food they need
 Why is there such poverty and hunger?
 Human beings dying amidst their blunder
 Tall Starbucks Frappuccino: \$3.55
 Out of \$4.00: 45 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

16,000 children die every day
 Their lives quickly taken away
 As the culprit surrounds their corpse
 Poverty lingers, conditions get worse
 American Eagle T-Shirt: \$22.50
 Out of \$23.00: 50 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

Just a few miles away
 A father says goodbye to his family as he takes off for the day
 He unlocks the door and gets into his car
 A brand new Lexus, he wanted to raise the bar
 A ballpoint pen: \$1.09
 Out of \$2.00: 91 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

A young girl whines to her mother
 Her stomach hurts, she calls for her brother
 Nothing to do, there is no money for a doctor
 The helpless mother proctors
 A can of Sprite: \$.75
 Out of \$1.00: 25 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

In the shack alongside, a family of 10 sits down to eat
 A slice of bread each, the ground for a seat
 Stomachs rumbling, still hungry the kids go to bed
 The parents watch as their sweet children lay down their dirty heads
 Groceries: \$100.23
 Out of \$101.00: 77 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

How can two people's lives be so different?
 One lives in a house, the other has no money for rent
 Smiling children versus ones who suffer from hunger
 So many unknown plights beneath the cry of thunder
 Umbrella: \$12.63
 Out of \$13.00: 37 cents is your change
 All it takes is a little change

What is meant by all this talk of change?
 All the change accumulated can cover a wide range
 Throughout this poem \$3.75 was raised
 Imagine the money! We would all be amazed
 If we rounded up our expenses and donated the change to those who have less
 The problems of poverty and hunger could finally be put to rest
 We could make such topics a thing of the past
 The help of one person could make another's meals last
 If one lesson is taken away from this poem
 Let it be told and shown
 That all it takes is a little change.

A large percentage of the food in the world today comes from agricultural activities. In this case I suggest that the governments of different countries should give loans or grants to subsistence farmers so that they can expand their farms and produce more food not only for themselves but for the whole nation as well. I also think that farmers should be well informed and educated about the modern farming methods...in this way we can diminish the rapid growth of hunger and poverty.

—LIBERTINE NAMBILI, Age 18, Namibia

HONORABLE MENTION

KHEITAL SHARMA RAMKISSOON

Age 15
Mauritius

A Future Without Poverty and Hunger

In the twenty-first century, we are facing an age of chaos where hunger and starvation are prevailing due to hunger and poverty. It is high time that each one of us should meditate deeply on this matter. It is the duty of each and every individual to be a world benefactor and to bring about transformation. Everyone, including the media, the government, religious societies, institutions, and nongovernmental organizations, should be concerned with changing the situation of hunger and poverty in today's world. For these problems to exist there must be causes that give rise to them in the first place. Eradicating the causes of hunger and poverty would help end these immense human problems, as described in this paper.

Eliminating wastage of food

According to America's Second Harvest, more than 41 billion pounds of food are wasted every year, while a 2004 study from the University of Arizona (UA) mentions that American households waste 14 percent of their food purchases on average, 15 percent of which includes products still within their expiration date but never opened. Timothy Jones of the UA Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology estimates that an average family of four currently tosses out \$590 per year just in meat, fruits, vegetables, and grain products. Fresh fruits and vegetables, fluid milk and grain products (including 16 billion pounds of milk and 14 billion pounds of grain products), and sweeteners such as sugar and high-fructose corn syrup account for two-thirds of the losses. It is also estimated that 130 pounds of food per person in the United States ends up in landfills. The annual value of this lost food is estimated at around \$31 billion, but the real story is that roughly 49 million people could have been fed by those lost resources.

Rebalancing the distribution of the world's food

The amount of grain produced in the world today could provide each person on the planet with the equivalent of two loaves of bread per day. Our current food production could feed 7 billion people—compare that to the 6 billion people who live on the Earth and it seems there shouldn't be a problem. However, deaths and suffering from hunger still persist across the globe.

The problem lies in the distribution of the world's food. Most food is produced in economically more developed countries. However, countries that are really in need of their share of the food to solve their hunger problems cannot afford the high prices that farmers charge and can get from other richer countries. The way to solve the problem of distribution is to encourage national governments to subsidize the purchase of food by less economically developed countries. In this way, the less economically developed countries are able to increase their food supplies, while the farmers are still able to gain competitive prices for their produce.

Making peace prevail

War, racism, and ethnocentrism underlie much of the world's hunger and undernutrition since they disrupt agricultural production and food access and divert government funds to funding arms and the war process. Consequently, there is little money to fund equipment and technology to increase food supplies or to import food from abroad. In Africa, per capita food production dropped by an average of 12.5 percent during times of conflict.

Peace negotiations in hunger-stricken areas help allow aid in and help the country to focus its time and resources on solving its hunger problems. It is in the world's interest for there to be peace, as trade can continue and resources can be used for productive reasons. Often, peace cannot be negotiated without a neutral third party to oversee the process—it is vital, therefore, for external world leaders to get involved. Without this vital involvement, peace among people often cannot occur and the problem of chronic persistent hunger just gets worse. Peace negotiations must be undertaken and organizations like the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University must continue to organize projects such as the 'Million Minutes of Peace' project and the 'Just-A-Minute' project to mobilize people to maintain peace.

Providing free education to all

In 500 BC, an anonymous Chinese poet wrote:

- If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed
- If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree
- If you are thinking one hundred years ahead, educate the people
- By sowing a seed once, you will harvest once
- By planting a tree, you will harvest tenfold
- By educating the people, you will harvest one hundredfold

Education has been proven to help solve the problem of chronic hunger. When people understand the reasons why there is hunger in their country, and the solutions that can help eradicate it, the problem can be solved much more easily and quickly. Education allows people to focus their time and energy on projects more efficiently, and helps to make them a success.

A good example is where the problem of a rapidly expanding population is quickly outgrowing available resources and food supplies. In countries like China, people have been educated about the consequences if their population problem isn't solved—chronic hunger being an example. They are shown the ways they can help maintain a higher standard of living, such as by having only one child. People can also be educated about how to use farm machinery more efficiently or can be trained how to do jobs in factories. These aspects of education not only help the person benefiting directly from it, but also help to develop the economy, brightening the country's future.

Benefiting from the Green Revolution

The Green Revolution refers to the application of modern, Western-type farming techniques in developing countries. However, it can only occur where funding has been provided to allow developing countries to expand their food-production methods. With the Green Revolution, more countries are beginning to use fertilizers, and new land is being made available through continually developing technologies. Food production per hectare has soared in the past 50 years.

In some countries, chronic hunger has been completely eradicated. When food can be produced more efficiently in greater quantities in areas geographically closer to where it is needed, costs for that food are reduced. When food costs less, more people can buy sufficient amounts to feed themselves and their families.

Promoting vegetarianism

While beef production takes about 10 to 20 calories of energy (fuel, feed, etc.) to produce 1 calorie of food, typical U.S. corn production takes about 1 calorie of energy (fuel, fertilizer, etc.) to produce 1 calorie of food, and dryland Asian rice culture uses on average 1 calorie of energy (human labor) to produce 20 calories of food. The range of efficiency here is clear and this is the reason why some groups, such as VEGFAM, believe that vegetarianism is a solution to world hunger.

Developing new technologies

In 1798, British economist Thomas Malthus highlighted a major problem: there exists a point in time where population will expand more than food supplies and mass starvation will prevail (see diagram). So far, the world's population has increased at a tremendous rate, but technological advances have increased food supplies to feed the population.

These technological advances have included the wide use of artificial fertilizers and rapid developments in mechanization (the use of machines in the production of food). In the past 25 years, technological advances have led to food production growing at an annual rate of 2.8 percent, whereas population is growing at an annual rate of 2.0 percent.

Another technological breakthrough is biotechnology—the idea of genetically modifying crops in an attempt to increase yields in the future. Making crops resistant to diseases and parasites is obviously the next step to increasing yields. However, this technology is still in development; it may not be safe due to the possibility of causing slight mutations that raise concern both for the environment and humans. For example, could some products upset the ecosystem, leaving nothing for insects to feed on: no insects, no birds, and so on—something that is not desirable for the security of the future.

Technologies such as the Internet that don't directly affect the production of food are also helping solve the problem of chronic hunger. The Internet is an ideal medium by which to broaden the awareness of poverty and help persuade people to support the cause, especially since chronic hunger occurs mainly in the developing world, in particular in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nigeria. One way these countries can solve the problem of hunger is by getting support from the developed world.

Encouraging international aid

Various governments continue to play a major role helping to end the problem of hunger. The main area in which governments can help is by providing aid to the countries that are in greatest need of it. The United States, for example, has played a major part in the development of a scheme to help prevent hunger and starvation whereby aid is given in a food-for-work agreement. However, corruption and mismanagement is a major problem in countries where aid is provided.

Schemes for food-development projects help countries not only with their short-term requirement for food, but also by helping them develop and provide for their future. Improving a country's transportation system and national resources also help its economy develop, which in turn helps to solve its long-term food-supply problems. Often, these people are rebuilding their country after a civil war that destroyed their food supplies. Sometimes, the people who are trying to help solve the hunger problems are targeted themselves.

Eliminating Debts

A common problem faced by the world's poorest countries is that they owe hundreds of billions of dollars in debt to many of the more developed countries. Fifty-two of the world's poorest countries (of which 37 are in Africa) owe a total of \$376 billion. The repayments for these huge debts take up a very large portion of each country's income, leaving them with little left to develop their economy, implement agricultural schemes, and import technologies to help solve their hunger problems. Many countries are therefore calling for the developed countries to cancel their debts, which would mean that the less-developed country would not have to repay them.

Preventing Money from leaving the economy

Some large multinational companies send all of the profits they gain in less-developed regions back to their main headquarters in more-developed countries. This takes more money out of the economy of the less-developed countries and contributes to the great imbalance of economic strength and hence, to increased poverty. If these companies instead tried to keep money in the less-developed countries, it would lead to growth in the countries' economies, which would in turn prevent poverty and hunger. Putting an end to poverty and hunger requires a strong investment in the region from companies, governments, and individuals—not only of money, but also of time and experience.

Accepting change

Often, the root cause of hunger in a particular country is not simply that it can't afford food. Many times, it is that there are underlying cultural beliefs which prevent progress. When members of a society are impeded from contributing all that they can with due respect, the potential improvement of that society is equally impeded. People are being restricted from helping their communities not because they are physically or economically restrained, but because they are instead limited by the often deeply rooted social structures and "rules"—official or unofficial. Changes to these social structures affect every level of humanity, and while often it is hard to change traditions that have been set for more than 3,000 years, social changes are among the most important changes that must be made to establish a stable, hunger-free world.

A world without hunger and poverty is at our doorstep. It is up to the citizens of this planet to realize that this world is just a global village where each one of us has the responsibility of contributing to the welfare of the other.



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